

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 LIMA 05282 152235Z
ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00
SSO-00 ICAE-00 INRE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03
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FM AMEMBASSY LIMA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 496
INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS
AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
AMEMBASSY QUITO
AMEMBASSY LA PZ
AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L LIMA 5282

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS PINT ELAB PE
SUBJ: PERU ON THE EVE OF ELECTIONS

SUMMARY: PERUVIANS GENERALLY APPEAR UNCERTAIN AND RATHER
APATHETIC ON THE EVE OF SUNDAY'S CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY
ELECTIONS. ECONOMIC CRISIS, GOVERNMENT RESTRICTIONS,
DISORGANIZED POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE AMBIGUOUS NATURE
OF THE ELECTION ITSELF HAVE ALL SERVED TO DAMPEN
ENTHUSIASM. BUT WE SENSE AN UNDERLYING NATIONAL CONSENSUS
IN FAVOR OF A RETURN TO CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT, A SENTIMENT
THAT COULD TRANSLATE INTO A RESPECTABLE VOTE ON SUNDAY
WITH BROAD SIGNIFICANCE FOR PERU'S POLITICAL FUTURE.
END SUMMARY.

1. ON SUNDAY PERU WILL HOLD ITS FIRST NATIONAL ELECTION
IN 15 YEARS. THE COUNTRY IS GENERALLY QUIET ON THE EVE
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 LIMA 05282 152235Z

OF THAT SIGNIFICANT EVENT. THE DISORDERS AND TENSIONS
OF LATE MAY HAVE ABATED, IN PART BECAUSE OF THE TONIC
PROVIDED BY THE NATIONAL TEAM'S UNEXPECTEDLY STRONG
SHOWING IN THE WORLD CUP. BUT DISTRACTIONS OF FUTBOL
ASIDE, THE PERUVIAN MOOD IS MARKED BY UNCERTAINTY AND
EVIDENT PESSIMISM. FINANCE MINISTER SILVA RUETE HAS
JUST GIVEN THE NATION A SOBER AND CANDID ACCOUNTING OF

THE TERRIBLE FINANCIAL CRISIS IT FACES (SEPTTEL), PROMISING NOT MUCH MORE THAN SACRIFICE AND DEPRIVATION IN THE YEARS AHEAD. THE ELECTION OFFERS NO EARLY SOLUTION -- NO QUICK FIX -- AND THAT FACT IS SINKING IN HERE.

2. THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN MUTED AND UNCERTAIN FROM THE OUTSET. AFTER SO MANY YEARS OF POLITICAL HIATUS THE PARTIES PROVED DISORGANIZED AND WEAK, UNABLE TO AWAKEN MUCH POPULAR ENTHUSIASM OR DRAW MEANINGFUL ISSUES FOR THE ELECTORATE. THE AMBIGUOUS NATURE OF THIS HALF-WAY HOUSE ELECTION, GOVERNMENT CONTROL OF THE DAILY PRESS AND TELEVISION, AND THE 19-DAY SUSPENSION IN CAMPAIGNING DICTATED BY THE STATE OF EMERGENCY, HAVE ALL SERVED TO COMPOUND THE PROBLEM. THE RESULT HAS BEEN CONFUSION ABOUT WHAT THE ELECTION MEANS AND A FAIR DEGREE OF WHAT MOST OBSERVERS REGARD AS APATHY.

3. THE GOP, WITH A GOOD DEAL OF POLITICAL CAPITAL NOW INVESTED IN THE ELECTION, HAS MADE SOME ATTEMPT IN THE LAST FEW DAYS TO COUNTER THESE NEGATIVE INFLUENCES. THE SATELLITE TRANSMISSIONS OF THE FUTBOL MATCHES FROM BUENOS AIRES FEATURE PERIODIC SUPERIMPOSED MESSAGES CALLING ON CITIZENS TO FULFILL THEIR CIVIC DUTY BY VOTING ON SUNDAY. (THE TELECASTS HAVE ALSO CARRIED PAID POLITICAL ADS BY APRA, THE PPC, AND THE PSR.) AN INSTRUCTIONAL MESSAGE ON VOTING PROCEDURES GETS FREQUENT CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 LIMA 05282 152235Z

PLAY ON TELEVISION AND RADIO. THE GOVERNMENT'S EL COMERCIO AND EL PERUANO HAVE PUBLISHED INCLUSIVE LISTS OF POLLING PLACES AND COMMITTEES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. GOP SPOKESMEN FROM THE PRESIDENT ON DOWN HAVE REITERATED THE COMMITMENT TO THE ELECTORAL SCHEDULE AND THE ULTIMATE TRANSFER OF POWER. THE GOP ALSO EXTENDED THE VOTING HOURS FOR SUNDAY (NOW 0700 TO 1700) AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, LET IT BE KNOWN THAT DEPORTEES AND FUGITIVES ELECTED ON SUNDAY WILL BE ALLOWED TO TAKE THEIR SEATS IN THE ASSEMBLY WITH PARLIAMENTARY IMMUNITY. (MINISTER OF INTERIOR VELIT CONFIRMED THAT DECISION TO THE AMBASSADOR THIS MORNING.) AS A RESULT, IT NOW APPEARS THAT ALL THE PARTIES OF THE LEFT WILL PARTICIPATE.

4. WE NOTE ONE SIGN THAT PUBLIC INTEREST MAY BE STRONGER THAN THE PESSIMISTS BELIEVE. EXTREMELY LONG LINES OF PEOPLE SEEKING DUPLICATES OF VOTING CEDULAS HAVE APPEARED OUTSIDE REGISTRY OFFICES THROUGHOUT LIMA. FURTHER, WE SENSE A STRONG POPULAR SENTIMENT FOR CHANGE UNDERNEATH THE QUIET AND APPARENTLY APATHETIC MOOD OF THE ELECTORATE. PERUVIANS OF ALL KINDS AND ALL POLITICAL PERSUASIONS SEEM TO AGREE ON THE PROPOSITION THAT

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH, THAT THE TIME HAS COME FOR THE MILITARY TO GO BACK TO THEIR BARRACKS. THAT CONSENSUS COULD MEAN A HEAVIER VOTE THAN ANTICIPATED ON JUNE 18; OR IT COULD ACT AS A DISINCENTIVE IF THE PERCEPTION HAS TAKEN HOLD THAT THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY IS A STALLING TACTIC (AS BELAUNDE SAYS IT IS) WITH NOTHING BETTER THAN STERILE DEBATE TO OFFER.

5. HOWEVER THESE FACTORS PLAY OUT, THE FACT THAT PERUVIANS WILL GO TO THE POLLS ON SUNDAY IS A TRIBUTE TO THE DETERMINATION AND THE FREQUENTLY UNAPPRECIATED POLITICAL SKILLS OF PRESIDENT MORALES BERMUDEZ. IT HAS BEEN A LONG AND DIFFICULT ROAD SINCE LAST JULY. AS FOR THE FUTURE, A SUCCESSFUL ELECTION COULD MEAN AN ACCEL-
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 LIMA 05282 152235Z

ERATED RETURN TO DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT BY NEXT YEAR -- IF THE POLITICIANS CAN KEEP FROM SPOILING THEIR OWN CHANCES. SOONER IS NOT NECESSARILY BETTER IN THIS CASE GIVEN THE ECONOMIC CRISIS. BUT THE MOMENTUM ESTABLISHED NEXT SUNDAY MAY PROVE IRRESISTIBLE.
SHLAUDEMAN

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